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SUBJECT: IF I WERE A RICH MAN - HASSAN ASADULLOZODA DONATES A
SYNAGOGUE

REF: 2008 DUSHANBE 887

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The local and international press have reported that presidential brother in law - and purported mensch - Hassan Asadullozoda donated a building to Tajikistan's Jewish Community for use as a synagogue. The reports have painted the donation as an attempt to atone for destroying the synagogue in June 2008 to make way for the grounds of a new presidential palace. While the donation is on its face a philanthropic act, it is likely that the Jewish Community is the beneficiary of an "arrangement" between two former Soviet businessmen. End summary.

¶2. (U) On March 26, the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS announced on its website that Hassan Asadullozoda, President Rahmon's brother in law, donated a building to Tajikistan's Jewish Community to use as a synagogue. The website described Asadullozoda as a "businessman and philanthropist" who visited New York regularly and met with representatives of the Bukharian Jewish diaspora. The Federation's President is Lev Leviev (also spelled Levayev), a billionaire businessman with political connections throughout the CIS.

¶3. (U) PolOff visited the building, a large house that is located in a prime location in the center of Dushanbe. The house has been completely renovated, with expensive looking fixtures and wood floors. Tajikistan's Jewish Community has been waiting for a miracle since June 2008, when Dushanbe authorities destroyed their synagogue to make room for a garden attached to the opulent Presidential Palace (reftel). A local Jewish businessman had been storing the synagogue's furniture, books and assorted chachkas in a warehouse in Dushanbe. The Head of the Community, Mikhail Abdurahmonov, told a reporter that, "all of the members of our community thank this wonderful man, who helped us in our most difficult hour."

¶4. (SBU) Comment: In reftel, we reported that there was something unkosher about the manner in which the synagogue was taken from Community. We also reported that Lev Leviev had intervened with the Tajik authorities - including President Rahmon - to craft a resolution to the Jewish Community's woes. It is highly likely that Asadullozoda's mitzve was the result of an agreement with Leviev, rather than a pure act of humanitarianism. It is also possible that the announcement was timed to distract from President Rahmon's signature of Tajikistan's controversial new religion law. One concern about the donation raised by a prominent local expert on religion and politics is that imams will complain that the President's family is helping the tiny Jewish community while at the same time the government is restricting Islamic religious practice. He hoped there would be no schmeer campaign. End comment.

JACOBSON